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FOR EUR/WE, NP/RA, AND NEA

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SUBJECT: IRAN HOSTS CONFERENCE MARCH 5-6 TO SHOW ITS
NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS IRREVERSIBLE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 (b and d)

11. (C) MFA Deputy Director for Policy Planning Philippe Errera (please protect) provided us with a brief readout of Iran's March 5-6 conference entitled "Nuclear Technology and Sustainable Development," sponsored by the Iranian Center for Strategic Research (CSR), the Foreign Ministry, the Atomic Energy organization of Iran, and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. In addition to the Iranian participants, researchers and academics from Europe, Canada and the U.S. also attended. There was extensive Iranian press and television coverage. Copy of the program with a listing of the various discussion panels has been faxed to NP/RA. At the end of the conference, the Iranians arranged visits to Isfahan/UCF and a Zirconium production plant, which Errera declined to attend in order to avoid potential propaganda misuse of his presence, given that he was the only government employee from an EU country.

12. (C) According to Errera, the declared purpose of the conference was to highlight the indispensability of nuclear energy and its importance to sustainable development, and to demonstrate the openness of Iran's nuclear facilities. The underlying objective, he added, was clearly to make the point that Iran had a right to pursue its nuclear energy program -- in the words of one Iranian, "the cow is out of the barn." Many at the conference were receptive to the message as they appeared to have been invited, in part, for their openness to the Iranian perspective, Errera noted. To reinforce Iran's message to the world, the opening and closing speeches very much laid down Iran's redlines against cessation of its nuclear activities. Several key Iranians, such as Hossein Moussavian and Hassan Rohani, met in private with some of the European and the American participants. According to Errera, he reiterated in his meetings the importance of Iranian compliance with its Safeguards Agreement. At the conference, Errera delivered remarks expanding on Iran's violations, the importance of its compliance, and the adverse effect that Iranian noncompliance would have on the credibility of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. (Note: while his views were his own, Errera cleared his remarks with the MFA's Strategic Affairs and Disarmament Directorate.)

13. (C) Errera said the general message from the Iranians was that it would not negotiate an end to its enrichment activities, and that Iran was not afraid of a UNSC referral. Cheginizadeh of CSR stated that Iran, like Japan, could develop a nuclear bomb within six months. Most of the Iranian commentators expressed the belief that Iranian possession of a nuclear bomb would have a moderating and stabilizing influence in the region. Dr. Tajik (sp?), President of a research center linked to President Khatami, took note of the new U.S. approach and said that U.S. participation in the EU negotiations would help; however, most other Iranians emphasized that the U.S. position would not alter the Iranian position. In a different vein, Rohani said that even if the EU were to prevail with its nonproliferation approach, the South would not support it at the IAEA or elsewhere. He noted that Algeria, and other countries in the South, were opposed to the West's anti-nuclear proliferation policies. Rohani opined that discussions with the EU would fail and that the EU would be found responsible for the failure.

14. (C) In terms of atmospherics, Errera said he found Iranian society to be dynamic and relatively open. The Iranians he met through the French Embassy during his short stay were not afraid to express criticism in public and via interpreters. Traveling through the city, he took extensive photos of a variety of sites without any visible restrictions. The anti-Americanism he encountered was only visible at our former embassy, which has been festooned with innumerable paintings/graffiti depicting the evil nature of the "U.S. empire." Debriefing some of the conference participants who went on the tour of Iran's facilities, he was told that the general impression was that they were unsophisticated, inefficient, and relatively ancient.

15. (C) Comment: Despite Errera's disclaimer that the views he presented at the conference were his own, an approach often taken by the MFA's Policy Planning Staff, the Iranians

clearly saw him as a French Government representative and identified him as such in the conference program. We note that Errera is but the latest in a series of French officials, academics, and one French Senator, welcomed by the Iranians in an effort to influence opinions of Iran. End comment.

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